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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

Notes and Comment

ON March 24th, Representative John V. Tunney, a California Democrat who seeks his party's nomination for United States senator, addressed the Wilshire Chamber of Commerce in Los Angeles and made some charges about our involvement in Laos that have not, as far as we have been able to learn, previously been made. We yield the floor to the Congressman:

We are today engaged... in a secret war in Laos, a tribal war in which the C.I.A. has committed the United States to support a faction of Meo tribesmen, led by General Vang Pao, whose sole objective is to dominate other factions of this opium-producing Meo tribe throughout Northern Laos. The C.I.A. has involved us in this covert operation, which is being fought around the Plain of Jars, more than one thousand miles away from the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The Administration has deliberately veiled in secrecy our deepening involvement in an opium tribal war which has the potential to engulf all of Southeast Asia in a full-fledged conflict which would have global repercussions.... On grounds of moral indignation, as a defender of democracy, we have unwittingly allowed ourselves to become involved in a situation which, to the Meo tribesman or Laotian warlord, has very little to do with his major cash crop—opium. For this tribal war has, as one of its prizes, an area capable of producing, on an annual basis, four to ten tons of marketable opium. This is equal to from two to six million dollars in Laotian currency. Refined as heroin and sold on the streets of Los Angeles, it would bring nearly nine hundred million dollars.... The clandestine yet official operations of the United States government could be aiding and abetting heroin traffic here at home.

Representative Tunney is in the middle of a hard campaign, and this is, of course, campaign oratory. It so happens, though, that his adviser on Southeast Asian affairs is Professor John T. McAlister, Jr., of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, at Princeton, who is the author of "Viet-Nam: The Origins of Revolution" and is probably the most emi-

nent scholar in the Southeast Asian field. Suspecting that it was on his authority that the candidate made these extraordinary assertions, we checked with the Professor and found that this was indeed the case. He would, he said, swear to the truth of them in any forum. The next move, we should think, would be up to Senator Fulbright.

Rooms

JAMES PARKER, a curator of Western European Arts at the Metropolitan Museum, oversees a remarkable collection of period rooms that was expanded this winter by the acquisition of two handsome eighteenth-century interiors from a Paris town house and a Viennese palace. We dropped in to see Mr. Parker recently and found him wrestling with a heavy wooden railing in the Louis XV Alcove, lifting it off the floor and onto a dolly with the help of a workman in a white coat. As he seemed capable of emitting only an "Oof" or two at this point, we postponed conversation and went downstairs to await him in his office.

Shelves full of art and history books lined the office, and more books were piled on his desk. On the walls above the shelves were fragments of ornamental wood panelling from eighteenth-century rooms. The furniture consisted of a four-legged stool covered in dusty needlepoint, and two chairs that appeared to be modified Chippendale. We were looking at one

of the chairs when Mr. Parker came in, dabbing his brow. "Done around 1740," he said. "The style is eighteenth-century bastard. We don't have anything very interesting in the way of office furniture. John Phillips, the chairman of the Department of Western European Arts, has a grand French chair that's a fake." Mr. Parker, a man in his middle forties, wore a gray suit, black tie, and glasses with shiny brown metal rims. After he sat down and caught his breath, we asked him why there are period rooms in museums.

"Because they are an effective way of recapturing the past. They give us a look at certain periods of history, and thereby give us some insight into our own time. They arose with the growth of public museums, in the nineteenth century. Their forerunners were the animal- and human-habitat groups in natural-history museums and the wax-museum tableaux in which figures were placed in domestic settings. In the eighteen-sixties, when domestic settings became of interest in themselves, period rooms appeared in Europe. They became popular in this country in the nineteen-twenties, when the American Wing was opened here at the Metropolitan. Our Western European rooms were opened in 1954, and today we have sixteen of them, containing furniture, paintings, porcelain, rugs, silver, tapestries, and sculpture. We also have eighteen galleries that are simply display areas and are not meant to be domestic settings."

Without further ado, Mr. Parker took us upstairs for a tour, beginning with a sixteenth-century French chapel. "The panelling in this room was installed in a New York house before the Museum got it—the Harry Payne Whitney house, which used to be at Sixty-eighth Street and Fifth Avenue. The room next door—an Elizabethan interior—was in the Morton F. Plant house, which was at Eighty-sixth Street and Fifth Avenue. You see, fine interiors sometimes do quite a bit of traveling through private houses before they



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